

**THE
VALLEY OF
DEMOCRACY**

**BY
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FOOTNOTES:



Michigan Avenue, Chicago, from the steps of the Art Institute.

TO MY CHILDREN

ELIZABETH, MEREDITH, AND LIONEL

IN TOKEN OF MY AFFECTION

AND WITH THE HOPE THAT THEY MAY BE
FAITHFUL TO THE
HIGHEST IDEALS OF AMERICAN CITIZENSHIP

AUTHOR'S NOTE TO THE FOURTH EDITION

In the reprintings of a book of this character it would be possible to revise and rewrite in such manner as to conceal the errors or misjudgments of the author. It seems, however, more honest to permit these impressions to stand practically as they were written, with only a few minor corrections. It was my aim to make note of conditions, tendencies, and needs in the Valley of Democracy, and the conclusion of the war has affected my point of view with reference to these matters very little.

The first months of the present year have been so crowded with incidents affecting the whole world that we recall with difficulty the events of only a few years ago. We have met repeated crises with an inspiring exhibition of unity and courage that should hearten us for the new tasks of readjustment that press for attention, and for the problems of self-government that are without end. I shall feel that these pages possess some degree of vitality if they quicken in the mind and heart of the reader a hope and confidence that we of America do not walk blindly, but follow a star that sheds upon us a perpetual light.

M. N.

INDIANAPOLIS, June 1, 1919.

France evoked from the unknown the valley that may, in more than one sense, be called the heart of America.... The chief significance and import of the addition of this valley to the maps of the world, all indeed that makes it significant, is that here was given (though not of deliberate intent) a rich, wide, untouched field, distant, accessible only to the hardiest, without a shadowing tradition or a restraining fence, in which men of all races were to make attempt to live together under rules of their own devising and enforcing. And as here the government of the people by the people was to have even more literal interpretation than in that Atlantic strip which had traditions of property suffrage and church privilege and class distinctions, I have called it the "Valley of the New Democracy."

—JOHN H. FINLEY: "The French in the Heart of America."

THE VALLEY OF DEMOCRACY

CHAPTER I

THE FOLKS AND THEIR FOLKSINESS

I

“THE great trouble with these fellows down here,” remarked my friend as we left the office of a New York banker—“the trouble with all of ’em is that they forget about the *Folks*. You noticed that when he asked in his large, patronizing way how things are going out West he didn’t wait for us to answer; he pressed a button and told his secretary to bring in those tables of railroad earnings and to-day’s crop bulletins and that sort of rubbish, so he could tell *us*. It never occurs to ’em that the Folks are human beings and not just a column of statistics. Why, the *Folks*——”

My friend, an orator of distinction, formerly represented a tall-corn district in Congress. He drew me into Trinity churchyard and discoursed in a vein with which I had long been familiar upon a certain condescension in Easterners, and the East’s intolerable ignorance of the ways and manners, the hopes and aims, of the West, which move him to rage and despair. I was aware that he was gratified to have an opportunity to unbosom himself at the brazen gates of Wall Street, and equally conscious that he was

experimenting upon me with phrases that he was coining for use on the hustings. They were so used, not without effect, in the campaign of 1916—a contest whose results were well calculated to draw attention to the “Folks” as an upstanding, independent body of citizens.

Folks is recognized by the lexicographers as an American colloquialism, a variant of folk. And folk, in old times, was used to signify the commonalty, the plain people. But my friend, as he rolled “Folks” under his tongue there in the shadow of Trinity, used it in a sense that excluded the hurrying midday Broadway throng and restricted its application to an infinitely superior breed of humanity, to be found on farms, in villages and cities remote from tide-water. His passion for democracy, his devotion to the commonweal, is not wasted upon New Englanders or Middle States people. In the South there are Folks, yes; his own people had come out of North Carolina, lingered a while in Kentucky, and lodged finally in Indiana, whence, following a common law of dispersion, they sought new homes in Illinois and Kansas. Beyond the Rockies there are Folks; he meets their leaders in national conventions; but they are only second cousins of those valiant freemen who rallied to the call of Lincoln and followed Grant and Sherman into battles that shook the continent. My friend’s point of view is held by great numbers of people in that region we now call the Middle West. This attitude or state of mind with regard to the East is not to be taken too seriously; it is a part of the national humor, and has been expressed with delightful vivacity and candor in Mr.

William Allen White's refreshing essay, "Emporia and New York."

A definition of Folks as used all the way from Ohio to Colorado, and with particular point and pith by the haughty sons and daughters of Indiana and Kansas, may be set down thus:

FOLKS. *n.* A superior people, derived largely from the Anglo-Saxon and Celtic races and domiciled in those northern States of the American Union whose waters fall into the Mississippi. Their *folksiness* (*q. v.*) is expressed in sturdy independence, hostility to capitalistic influence, and a proneness to social and political experiment. They are strong in the fundamental virtues, more or less sincerely averse to conventionality, and believe themselves possessed of a breadth of vision and a devotion to the common good at once beneficent and unique in the annals of mankind.

We of the West do not believe—not really—that we are the only true interpreters of the dream of democracy. It pleases us to swagger a little when we speak of ourselves as the Folks and hint at the dire punishments we hold in store for monopoly and privilege; but we are far less dangerous than an outsider, bewildered or annoyed by our apparent bitterness, may be led to believe. In our hearts we do not think ourselves the only good Americans. We merely feel that the East began patronizing us and that anything we may do in that line has been forced upon us by years of outrageous contumely. And when New York went to bed on the night of election day, 1916, confident that as went

the Empire State so went the Union, it was only that we of the West might chortle the next morning to find that Ah Sin had forty packs concealed in his sleeve and spread them out on the Sierra Nevadas with an air that was child-like and bland.

Under all its jauntiness and cocksureness, the West is extremely sensitive to criticism. It likes admiration, and expects the Eastern visitor to be properly impressed by its achievements, its prodigious energy, its interpretation and practical application of democracy, and the earnestness with which it interests itself in the things of the spirit. Above all else it does not like to appear absurd. According to its light it intends to do the right thing, but it yields to laughter much more quickly than abuse if the means to that end are challenged.

The pioneers of the older States endured hardships quite as great as the Middle Westerners; they have contributed as generously to the national life in war and peace; the East's aid to the West, in innumerable ways, is immeasurable. I am not thinking of farm mortgages, but of nobler things—of men and women who carried ideals of life and conduct, of justice and law, into new territory where such matters were often lightly valued. The prowler in these Western States recognizes constantly the trail of New Englanders who founded towns, built schools, colleges, and churches, and left an ineffaceable stamp upon communities. Many of us Westerners sincerely admire the East and do reverence to Eastern gods when we can sneak unobserved into the temples. We dispose of our crops and merchandise as quickly as possible, that we may be seen of men in New

York. Western school-teachers pour into New England every summer on pious pilgrimages to Concord and Lexington. And yet we feel ourselves, the great body of us, a peculiar people. "Ten days of New York, and it's me for my home town" in Ohio, Indiana, Kansas, or Colorado. This expresses a very general feeling in the provinces.

It is far from my purpose to make out a case for the West as the true home of the Folks in these newer connotations of that noun, but rather to record some of the phenomena observable in those commonwealths where we are assured the Folks maintain the only true ark of the covenant of democracy. Certain concessions may be assumed in the unconvinced spectator whose path lies in less-favored portions of the nation. The West does indubitably coax an enormous treasure out of its soil to be tossed into the national hopper, and it does exert a profound influence upon the national life; but its manner of thought is different: it arrives at conclusions by processes that strike the Eastern mind as illogical and often as absurd or dangerous. The two great mountain ranges are barriers that shut it in a good deal by itself in spite of every facility of communication; it is disposed to be scornful of the world's experience where the experience is not a part of its own history. It believes that forty years of Illinois or Wisconsin are better than a cycle of Cathay, and it is prepared to prove it.



“Ten days of New York, and it’s me for my home town.”

The West’s philosophy is a compound of Franklin and Emerson, with a dash of Whitman. Even Washington is a pale figure behind the Lincoln of its own prairies. Its curiosity is insatiable; its mind is speculative; it has a supreme confidence that upon an agreed state of facts the Folks, sitting as a high court, will hand down to the nation a true and just decision upon any matter in controversy. It is a patient listener. Seemingly tolerant of false prophets, it amiably gives them hearing in thousands of forums while

awaiting an opportunity to smother their ambitions on election day. It will not, if it knows itself, do anything supremely foolish. Flirting with Greenbackism and Free Silver, it encourages the assiduous wooers shamelessly and then calmly sends them about their business. Maine can approach her election booths as coyly as Ohio or Nebraska, and yet the younger States rejoice in the knowledge that after all nothing is decided until they have been heard from. Politics becomes, therefore, not merely a matter for concern when some great contest is forward, but the year round it crowds business hard for first place in public affection.

II

The people of the Valley of Democracy (I am indebted for this phrase to Dr. John H. Finley) do a great deal of thinking and talking; they brood over the world's affairs with a peculiar intensity; and, beyond question, they exchange opinions with a greater freedom than their fellow citizens in other parts of America. I have travelled between Boston and New York on many occasions and have covered most of New England in railway journeys without ever being addressed by a stranger; but seemingly in the West men travel merely to cultivate the art of conversation. The gentleman who borrows your newspaper returns it with a crisp comment on the day's events. He is from Beatrice, or Fort Collins, perhaps, and you quickly find that he lives next door to the only man you know in his home town. You praise Nebraska, and he meets you in a generous spirit of reciprocity and compliments Iowa, Minnesota, or any other commonwealth you may honor with your citizenship.

The West is proud of its talkers, and is at pains to produce them for the edification of the visitor. In Kansas a little while ago my host summoned a friend of his from a town eighty miles away that I might hear him talk. And it was well worth my while to hear that gentleman talk; he is the best talker I have ever heard. He described for me great numbers of politicians past and present, limning them with the merciless stroke of a skilled caricaturist, or, in a benignant mood, presented them in ineffaceable miniature. He knew Kansas as he knew his own front yard. It was a delight to listen to discourse so free, so graphic in its characterizations, so colored and flavored with the very soil. Without impropriety I may state that this gentleman is Mr. Henry J. Allen, of the *Wichita Beacon*; the friend who produced him for my instruction and entertainment is Mr. William Allen White of the *Emporia Gazette*. Since this meeting I have heard Mr. Allen talk on other occasions without any feeling that I should modify my estimate of his conversational powers. In his most satisfying narrative, "The Martial Adventures of Henry and Me," Mr. White has told how he and Mr. Allen, as agents of the Red Cross, bore the good news of the patriotism and sympathy of Kansas to England, France, and Italy, and certainly America could have sent no more heartening messengers to our allies.

I know of no Western town so small that it doesn't boast at least one wit or story-teller who is exhibited as a special mark of honor for the entertainment of guests. As often as not these stars are women, who discuss public matters with understanding and brilliancy. The old superstition that women are deficient in humor never struck me as

applicable to American women anywhere; certainly it is not true of Western women. In a region where story-telling flourishes, I can match the best male anecdotalist with a woman who can evoke mirth by neater and defter means.

The Western State is not only a political but a social unit. It is like a club, where every one is presumably acquainted with every one else. The railroads and interurbans carry an enormous number of passengers who are solely upon pleasure bent. The observer is struck by the general sociability, the astonishing amount of visiting that is in progress. In smoking compartments and in day coaches any one who is at all folksy may hear talk that is likely to prove informing and stimulating. And this cheeriness and volubility of the people one meets greatly enhances the pleasure of travel. Here one is reminded constantly of the provincial confidence in the West's greatness and wisdom in every department of human endeavor.

In January of last year it was my privilege to share with seven other passengers the smoking-room of a train out of Denver for Kansas City. The conversation was opened by a vigorous, elderly gentleman who had, he casually remarked, crossed Kansas six times in a wagon. He was a native of Illinois, a graduate of Asbury (Depauw) College, Indiana, a Civil War veteran, and he had been a member of the Missouri Legislature. He lived on a ranch in Colorado, but owned a farm in Kansas and was hastening thither to test his acres for oil. The range of his adventures was amazing; his acquaintance embraced men of all sorts and conditions, including Buffalo Bill, whose funeral he had just attended in Denver. He had known General George A. Custer and

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